

HORIZONS

Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims



Federal Emergency Management Agency

January 19, 2001

A Personal Message from Our Director

As part of our ongoing community outreach program, I am pleased to announce that the Cerro Grande Office of Fire Claims has created a bi-monthly newsletter, HORIZONS. The purpose of HORIZONS is to inform the public of the ongoing activities of our office.

Our program has come a long way since the doors to our Service Centers opened last August 28. Since that time, we have put in place a number of policies and procedures that will enable us to compensate individuals who suffered losses during the fire. Many of these policy decisions were made after receiving valuable input from members of the community.

To date, we have received 3958 Notices of Loss. We have made partial payments on 1905 of the claims in the amount of \$22,815,167.

In the months to come, I hope this newsletter will serve as a valuable information source for all individuals interested in the Cerro Grande Fire Claims process. We welcome your questions, comments, concerns and suggestions. Please visit any of our Service Centers, call our Helpline at 1 888-748-1853, or you can now email us at our newly created address: cerrogrande-newsletter@fema.gov.

We still have much work left to do, but I want to assure you that the Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims is committed to making this process work for each and every claimant.

Perhaps you are curious about the title we selected for this publication. HORIZONS signifies "looking toward a new beginning," which is our hope for the families affected by the Cerro Grande fire. With that thought, we wish you all the very best in 2001.

Sincerely,

Donald Erbach
Director
Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims

Cerro Grande Fire Claims Service Center Locations

**Hours: M-F 9-6 pm
Saturday 9-12 noon**

**Los Alamos
IT Building
235 Central Park Square
661-3121**

**White Rock
134 State St
672-4020**

**Espanola
Johnson Controls Building
1027 North Railroad Avenue
747-4204**

**Santa Clara Pueblo
Behind Health Clinic
747-0313**

**San Ildefonso Pueblo
TEWA Visitors Center
455-7759**

Find Out at the Library

Here's something new — our own information booth at the Los Alamos Public Library on Saturday mornings beginning January 20.

The booth, to be staffed from 9 a.m. to noon, will give the public an opportunity to ask questions about the policies and programs of the Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims. A variety of specialists will be on hand to meet with you personally to discuss the various aspects of the claims process. Customer service representatives will be prepared to assist in calculating estimates for the Square Foot Replacement Option. In addition, our mitigation officer and an IRS consultant will also be available.

Post-Fire Economy In Los Alamos To Be Assessed

What affects land values in Los Alamos?

That is one of many questions that one of the nation's foremost accounting/consulting firms will be examining this month.

The Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims (OCGFC) has engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP to conduct an independent study of the economic impact that last year's fire had on Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Sandoval and Santa Fe counties.

The OCGFC will use the PricewaterhouseCooper's economic and valuation analysis to develop policies that will assist in compensating claimants fairly for certain types of losses.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP team is comprised of highly-skilled accountants, economists, financial analysts and real estate appraisers. The team will primarily address issues related to diminution of value. The following are some of the factors they will evaluate:

- The Los Alamos County economy prior to the fire
- A review of the role LANL plays in the Los Alamos economy
- Supply and demand for new existing housing
- Impacts on value of residential real estate
- Other factors occurring at the same time or after the fire that may have had adverse effects on the economy and real estate market of Los Alamos County

"The analysis will help us to determine whether economic harm caused by the fire will be long-lasting or whether the area can be expected to bounce back quickly and overcome a temporary downturn," said Donald Erbach, director of the OCGFC. "The firm will also look into other economic questions, such as whether the fire harmed tourism in Northern New Mexico and if so to what extent."

The firm is expected to complete its study by the end of January. Its findings will be aired at a public meeting early next month. The time, place and format of the meeting will be announced prior to the meeting.

Personal Property Checklists Now Available

The Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims has created a worksheet that might help people to itemize personal property damaged or lost in last year's fire.

The checklist, which will be available after reviewers have tested its efficiency with claimants, is organized on a room-by-room basis. The list can be used both by those who have already filed a Notice of Loss and begun the claims process, and those who have not yet done so. Using it is anticipated to simplify the process and ultimately speed up the issuance of a partial payment.

Joe Pavlas, on loan to the office from the Small Business Administration, developed the list based on similar inventories that the SBA uses in making low-interest disaster loans to homes. Other members of the staff also contributed to the worksheet.

"It's not a complete list," Pavlas said, "but there's room to write additional items. It's a good starting tool to jog the memory and get people going."

It can be used for damaged or destroyed homes, for property lost and property in need of cleaning or repair, and can be used by people who already filed and recognize the need to amend their claim. There are also those who need a start to get past emotional resistance to listing their losses.

Pavlas suggests that the optimum way to use the worksheet is to go through it quickly, then return to each room-by-room list to fill it out more painstakingly.

The worksheets do not contain any suggested values for property, and are solely intended for use as a tool for survivors.

Fire Assistance Information Goes Email

Anyone who suffered injuries, damages and other losses as a result of the Cerro Grande fire may send their questions or comments to our newly-created email address at: cerrograndenewsletter@fema.gov. We will respond to your requests as rapidly as possible. If we do not have the answer at this time, we will still acknowledge your inquiry. We hope this proves to be an effective vehicle for communication.

Payment Statistics

As of: 01/15/01

Payments Processed:

Partial Payments:	\$22,815,167
Individuals	\$12,837,069
Businesses	\$ 3,726,332
State/County	\$ 6,162,702
Not-For-Profit	\$ 89,062

You May Be Eligible For Federal Funds

The following are losses and expenses that you may be eligible for reimbursement due to the fire.

Evacuation expenses such as:

- Hotel or motel accommodations
- Mileage
- Phone Calls
- Meals
- Clothing
- Laundry and dry cleaning
- Pets
- Livestock

Or, other expenses such as:

- Food Loss
- Insurance Deductible
- Underinsured losses
- Flood insurance
- Lost Wages
- Medical
- Smoke Damage
- Trees/Landscaping/Garden
- Structures
- Mitigation
- Cleanup labor
- Firewood
- Business Losses
- Personal injury
- Other financial losses
- Real and personal property
- Mitigation

If you believe you are eligible you may visit a Customer Service Center or complete a notice of Loss form available on the FEMA website

Who We Are

We are the Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims (OCGFC.) Our office was created after Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the "Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act." The purpose of the law is to compensate survivors of the Cerro Grande fire for damages as a result of the fire, and to provide for an expeditious settlement of claims for those injuries.

What We Do

The OCGFC has been tasked to design and administer the program to fully compensate those who suffered injuries or expenses. We have been operating under interim regulations and are now working to finalize those regulations. As Notices of Loss are submitted and the claim presents an issue, we go to work to develop a policy to address those issues. What are we doing to help those ready to rebuild? We have established a way to make it easy to calculate replacement costs. Our Mitigation team is offering ways to build more fire resistant homes. And, our claims processing section is streamlining computer programs to expedite the process.

How We Do It

Our administrative staff in Santa Fe is comprised of the Director and Deputy Director, our policy development team, authorizing officials, mitigation specialists, data tracking team, external affairs, claims reviewers, comptroller, Office of Inspector General and administrative support. Each and every individual is dedicated to the task at hand. With events that change daily, the over-riding effort to provide excellence is consistent throughout the Cerro Grande Claims Office. We are proud to be the administrators of the Act and are committed to providing fair and reasonable compensation to those affected.

Contact Us!

We have a brand new email address: cerrograndenewsletter@fema.gov or Call our Helpline 1-888-748-1853, or for general information, visit the FEMA website at www.fema.gov/cerrogrande

NOTICE

In connection with the Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), an arm of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), reminds claimants that OIG is responsible for auditing and investigating claims and under the Act. Persons making false claims can be charged with a felony and, if convicted, face a maximum five- to 10- year prison term, and/or up to \$250,000 in fines